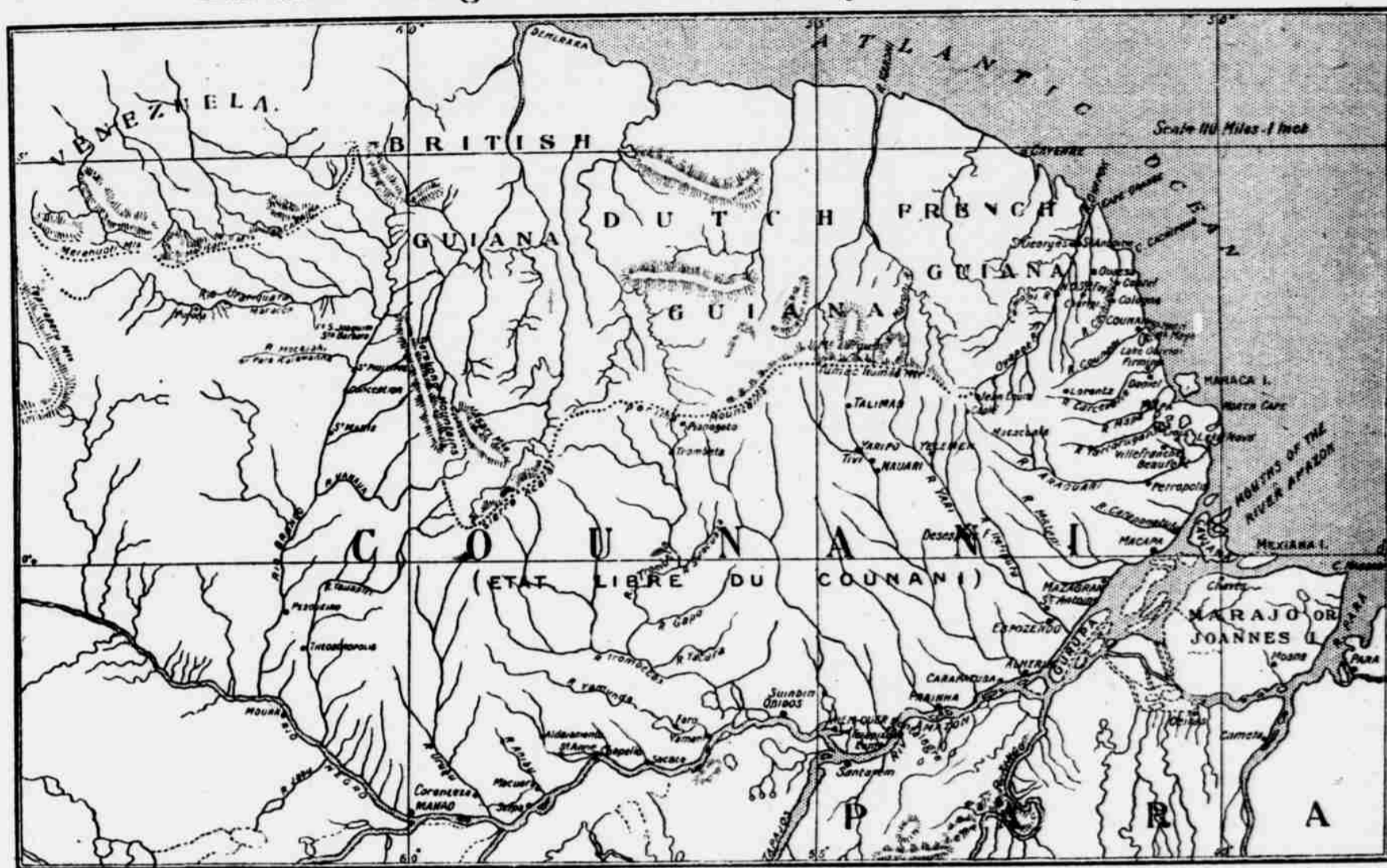


Modern Romance of the Land of El Dorado

Strange Adventurers Figured in the Attempt to Take Counani From Brazil—Germans Lurked in Background—One Excellency Now in City Prison



Map of Counani. This is one of the regions where legend locates El Dorado.

ROMANCE lurks within the gloomy walls of the city prison. The drab tatters of diplomatic hopes stalk within the corridors of that correctional pile. "His Excellency the Honorable Thomas L. Reynolds, Ambassador Plenipotentiary from the Amazon Republic," is unhappily doing a bit of time there because of the authorities' disapproval of his penchant for roulette and his openhanded hospitality toward those of a kindred hankering for games of chance. "His Excellency" fell into disrepute with the powers that be all because the wheel of fortune turned with curious persistency against one of the diplomat's guests and, in the vernacular familiar to certain walks of life, the disgruntled venturer "squealed."

During his trial, the "Ambassador Plenipotentiary" was decidedly hazy regarding the geographical identity of the State, he had once been asked to represent in this country. This was a mere matter of detail that had somehow failed to impress itself upon him other than to identify the region more or less generally with the rather farflung wanderings of the River Amazon. "His Excellency" probably recalled with more clarity the genial coterie of empire builders who had sought his potent aid, learning as they had that he was conspicuous in the councils of Tammany Hall, and, therefore, probably just the type of American to represent their cause in Washington. "His Excellency" may have been a bit hasty in accepting the responsibilities and the dignities showered upon him, but it is only fair to say that other Americans have been similarly bewildered by blazes of gold lace, glittering decorations and that indescribable glamour with which shady foreigners of simulated courtly grace are wont to surround themselves.

His Excellency Met Archduke.

The story of "His Excellency's" diplomatic elevation dates back just eight years, when New York city was made the headquarters of near royalty, and quite unknown to the common people of Manhattan the long lost Archduke of Austria lived in our midst for many weeks and held imposing audiences within the sequestered suite of one of the uptown hotels. That is to say, the distinguished gentleman who held out luring prospects to Thomas L. Reynolds cloaked himself in the atmosphere of a veritable scion of the house of Hapsburg, and his entourage made no bones about confidentially admitting that the august personage was, indeed, none other than the missing and supposedly dead member of the Austrian imperial family.

The elusive Archduke, variously known as John Orth and Baron de Ott, had been reported discovered in scores of places from time to time and afar from Vienna, but despite the fact that the imperial authorities made persistent efforts to catch up with him he seemed always able to give them the slip and to refuse to play the part of the prodigal son. Naturally this desire for seclusion and the urge of an enduring wanderlust made it comparatively easy for counterfeits of royalty to pose as the errant Johann. It will be recalled that this member of the Tuscan branch, for reasons that appealed strongly at the time, resigned his dignities in October of 1889, assumed the name of Johann Orth and set sail as the skipper of the merchant ship *St. Margaret*. The vessel was supposed to have been lost off the coast of South America and with it the Archduke. But his ghost would not stay laid.

Mission Here a Failure.

When the late Rear Admiral Winfield S. Schley was commander in chief of our South Atlantic squadron in 1900, his flagship was at Buenos Ayres, and while the Admiral was ashore at one of the hotels he met a Baron de Ott, who introduced his wife afterward. The Baron explained that he owned a large ranch in Entre Rios, but that it was remote, so it was their custom to spend the winter months at the Argentine capital. Whether or not the Baron was, in fact, the supposedly lost Johann Orth, Admiral Schley said that the Baron spoke with a show of intimate knowledge of the fateful tragedy and sudden death of the Crown Prince Rudolph and Maria Vetsera. He gave Admiral Schley to understand that because of his identification in some way with that unhappy affair he was not permitted to return to Austria, but instead was pensioned to keep away.

In 1910 a man styling himself Baron de Ott appeared in London, and with apparent deliberation proceeded to make himself persona grata with the reputed head of that aspirant republic with which Thomas L. Reynolds was some months later to become identified by the bestowal of long range honors. The Baron did not hesitate to convey the impression that he had very influential official and social relations in the United States, and, finally, to make his case still stronger, he asserted that he had been a guest of Admiral Schley upon the U. S. S. *Brooklyn* during the battle of Santiago. This, in the language of the present day, was merely persuasive camouflage and without one whit of foundation in fact. The Baron won the day and in due course was appointed to

head a commission of three sent over here eight years ago.

Upon arriving in New York in the spring of 1910 the Baron and his wife established themselves at a hotel in the region of Central Park, and there, within the limits of his suite, maintained all of the fuss and formality of his professed position. In those chambers he donned military garb, displayed conspicuously certain decorations and formed the central figure of a comic opera setting, while his associates did their angling for Reynolds and others who might, by reason of their reported wealth and political power, serve the cause of Counani at our national capital. For the sake of those who may not be familiar with Counani, let it be said that it is a pretty big section of northern Brazil, which, according to the separatists, has never been an integral unit of Brazil, but, instead, a free state and the possessor of an independent Government which other nations have not yet agreed to recognize, no matter what may be the justice of the claims involved.

While here the self-styled Baron did not prove a success. He not only bred dissension within his entourage, but he utterly failed to win the financial support of any of the would-be diplomats who were admitted to his august presence. Not only that, but he was both arrogant and aggressive, probably due to the imperial strain of his Teuton blood. After a couple of months of his little show here, without box receipts, the Baron packed away his stage properties and departed without ceremony for England. After he had left it was found that there were many irreconcilable discrepancies in the stories that he had glibly told, and the cause of the Free State of Counani was by no means improved through his efforts to enlist the present sojourner in the city prison.

Counani Scandal in Paris.

Curiously, just about the time the Baron sailed away one of the members of his commission acquired a measure of undesirable notoriety here. The Marquis de Casoret, the gentleman in question, decided to marry and, accordingly, did this in an unconventional fashion before a City Magistrate. Up to that time the Marquis had been accompanied by his acknowledged consort, but, in view of the newspaper announcements, the union had seemingly been "without benefit of clergy," as Kipling puts it. The marriage license revealed the fact that the lady enjoyed a German name! It may have been mere coincidence, but the link with the Central Powers was further strengthened by the Marquis's close relations with the rich and powerful Mannesmann group of metallurgical interests. The question

is, Was the commission covertly working for Germany in an effort to obtain, under the guise of promoting a free state, a great and potentially rich region in South America?

Less than a year after Baron de Ott and his associates left the United States Counani acquired a good deal of publicity through attacks in the French press by the enemies of ex-Minister Combes. To damage Combes and his son, certain Parisian papers assailed some of their friends who were known to be interested in Counani, and in this campaign Counani was held up as a swindling project and the chief of the Counanian Government described as little better than a cheat. The papers charged him with selling decorations, concessions and options on rubber lands. As might be expected, the Marquis de Casoret, being Counani's diplomatic representative in Paris, was held up as an object of opprobrium. As a result Adolphe Brezet, a Frenchman by birth, who had served for years as Chief of the Counanian Government while living in Europe, was forced into seclusion. As a topic of conversation Counani ceased to be of interest in the chancelleries of Europe for many months thereafter.

Buccaneering With Battleships.

Adolphe Brezet had lived in northern Brazil for a considerable period and had won, so it was reported, the staunch support of the native or Indian population. These people chose him to be their president, and to further the cause of their independence he went to Europe in the course of time. In 1905 Brezet appeared in London and established himself modestly in a suburb of that metropolis. Upon the wall of his "legation" he displayed a large map depicting the Free State of Counani, embracing an area of approximately 350,000 square miles. That is to say, the State appeared bounded on the north by Venezuela and the Guianas, on the south by the Amazon and Rio Negro rivers, on the east by the Atlantic Ocean, and on the west by the Rio Branco. Certainly a tidy stretch of country and one that would be fabulously productive in the hands of a competent and enterprising people.

Early in 1913 Counani was again brought within the focus of international eyes, and the *Express* of London published a tale that must have made the bones of Drake, Hawke, Froisher and others of their kidney squirm in their graves with envy. Those doughty quasi pirates were to be outdone in a manner that would make them appear as scarcely better than pikers in the field of buccaneering. The scheme was nothing less than filibustering brought up to date with